

sombr

National Standards: Pr4, Re 7-9, Cn11

The rise of Shane Michael Boose, a.k.a. sombr, is perhaps the perfect encapsulation of Gen Z musical stardom. Positioned at the apex of music technology, algorithmic optimization, and app-based parasocial relationships, Sombr has captured the zeitgeist and exploded into the spotlight in a way that would have been impossible even a decade ago. Though the quality of his artistic output has been subject to youthful inconsistency, there is no denying the talent and appeal behind his signature “yearncore” aesthetic. While it’s impossible to predict the future, it’s hard to imagine an indie pop star more tailor-made for the moment. Share sombr’s story with your class today!

Prepare

By a show of hands, ask the class how many of them are familiar with sombr. Given his meteoric rise through social media domination, it is highly likely that the algorithm has introduced most students to his music. Which of his songs have students heard? What else do they know about him? Beyond his music, are students aware of his impact in the fashion world?

Next, play clips of recent singles “12 to 12” and “we never dated” and ask students to describe sombr’s musical style. What kind of lyrics does he write? How does his voice sound? What about his style and aesthetic make him stand out?

Next, read the article as a class.

Key points in the article:

- Born and raised on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, Shane Michael Boose’s musical development was hyper-modern. Rather than learning music through formal lessons or forming bands with friends, Boose began experimenting with Garageband on his laptop as a child, eventually graduating to Apple’s Logic DAW in middle school and learning through online tutorials.
- Though he started releasing music as sombr in 2021, his breakthrough came with the 2022 release of “caroline,” a wistful acoustic song with diary-level vulnerability. Within weeks of its release, the song caught fire online and began racking up massive streaming numbers, allowing Boose to become a full-time musical artist in his junior year of high school.
- Consciously or unconsciously, sombr creates music that performs extremely well with social media algorithms, with tight hooks and emotional intimacy perfect for lip-sync videos and breakup montages. His online persona also plays a huge role in the appeal, leaping deftly between deep vulnerability and distant mystique to create maximum engagement (often bordering on parasocial obsession).

Begin

Review Vocabulary words from the article below:

- **Incubate:** to maintain favorable conditions that promote development
- **Auteur:** an artist with a distinctive, instantly recognizable approach
- **Niche:** a specialized segment of the market for a particular kind of product or service
- **Parasocial:** a connection that someone feels between themselves and a famous (or fictional) person they do not know
- **Ambiguity:** the state of having more than one possible meaning

Discuss

After reading the article, conduct a classroom discussion about sombr's career and artistic evolution. Did any descriptions of his musical style resonate with the class? Do they agree with the author's analysis of his appeal, algorithmic optimization, and "yearncore" aesthetic?

Next, listen to sombr's breakout hit "caroline" and ask the class to describe its style, lyrical focus, and production sound. How does it compare to his latest release? In what ways has sombr's artistry evolved, and in what ways has it stayed true to his roots?

O&A

1. Which 2022 single was sombr's breakout hit?
2. What was the title of sombr's 2025 debut album?
3. Which runway appearance underscored sombr's crossover potential as both musician and style icon?
4. How many nominations did sombr receive at the 2025 MTV Video Music Awards?
5. What have fans dubbed sombr's genre/musical aesthetic?

Answers

1. "caroline"
2. *I Barely Know Her*
3. Vogue World 2025
4. Three
5. "Yearncore"

Expand

As noted in the article, one of Sombr's defining traits is his role as both artist and producer. This puts him in the same category as artists like Kevin Parker (Tame Impala) and Billie Eilish. For an extra assignment, have students research and select another artist whose musical identity was largely shaped through self-production. Assign a written report detailing their chosen artist's

career trajectory and music production style and comparing it to sombr. How does the selected artist's rise to fame compare to sombr? Is the selected artist a self-taught, bedroom studio producer like sombr? If not, how do they write and record their songs? Do fans of the selected artist have an intense interest in their personal life outside of music, or do they maintain privacy and distance?

How To Play "Shut Up And Dance" by Walk The Moon

National Standards: 1-9

Covering modern dance pop anthems often presents a particular challenge. Songs on the Hot 100 chart tend to be highly produced, with lush, intricate arrangements, and surgically precise mixes that carefully balance dozens of sounds at once. This can be a huge creative challenge (or nightmare) for smaller ensembles. Luckily, there are still a few acts out there creating floor-packing dance hits that can be faithfully reproduced by a four-piece band. Walk The Moon's "Shut Up and Dance" is a perfect example; all the glossy pop sheen you'd expect from a Top 10 hit, but with a relatively minimal arrangement. Add it to your ensemble's repertoire today!

Prepare

To start, ask the class if they have heard "Shut Up And Dance." Although the song is over a decade old, it has proven to be an enduring hit for Walk The Moon and their highest chart placement to date. Play the song in its entirety and have the class take notes. How would they describe the style/genre of the song? What instruments do they hear? How would they describe the dynamics going from verse to prechorus to chorus? What are some key moments in the song?

After discussing, read the article as a class.

Key points in the article:

- Covering a highly-produced pop song can often be challenging (without a huge ensemble or the ability to incorporate recorded tracks into a live performance). However, "Shut Up And Dance" is a refreshing break from this trend. The arrangement isn't what most would consider minimalistic, but it can be easily recreated by a four-piece live band, making it a great pick for young ensembles.
- With clever dynamics, a trusty "four on the floor" dance beat, and a jubilant chorus hook, "Shut Up And Dance" is a masterclass on how to get bodies on the dance floor. It wastes no time, jumping into a half-chorus in just the third bar, and only grows more exciting from there.
- Whether or not it was produced and arranged with a live show in mind, "Shut Up And Dance" is almost tailor-made for the band's four-piece format. The only changes required are in the guitarist's hands, who, during live performance, cleverly combines the most important elements from both guitar parts on the record into one. To really elevate the performance, the backing band also hits a few accents to accentuate important vocal parts.

Begin

Review Vocabulary words from the article below:

- **Arpeggio:** the notes of a chord played in succession, either ascending or descending
- **Harmony:** how pitches relate to one another in a piece of music
- **Interlude:** a relatively short musical passage or section that occurs between larger, more prominent sections of a composition
- **Unison:** when two or more musicians play the same part simultaneously
- **Punctuate:** to emphasize; punctuate

Discuss

After reading the article, conduct a classroom discussion comparing their notes about “Shut Up And Dance” with the article’s analysis. Did their observations match the author’s assessments of the song? Did the author point out any important elements that students missed on their initial listen? If so, play the song once more and see if the class can catch it on second listen.

Next, conduct a class brainstorm session about how to adapt “Shut Up And Dance” to their lineup of instruments. If the ensemble includes drums, bass, electric guitar, keys, and at least one vocalist, they can adapt a note-for-note recreation of Walk The Moon’s live interpretation (as demonstrated in the linked videos at the end of the article). If the ensemble has multiple guitarists, they can recreate the exact parts from the record. If the ensemble is missing any of these instruments, find a creative replacement – could a saxophone replace the synth solo? Could a sousaphone replace the bass? Could a ukulele replace the guitar? Get creative!

Q&A

1. What was Walk The Moon’s minor hit from their debut album?
2. What instrument is actually playing the bass part on the record in “Shut Up and Dance?”
3. In the live versions of “Shut Up And Dance,” which instrument condenses multiple parts into one (and still sounds great)?
4. Which band mentioned in the article also used sixteenth-note digital delays on guitar riffs?
5. Which measure of the song does the lead vocal come in with the chorus?

Answers

1. "Anna Sun"
2. Synthesizer with a slightly fuzzy sound
3. Guitar
4. U2
5. In the third measure

Expand

Before the next meeting of the ensemble, have students learn their individual parts as decided in the earlier brainstorm session. At the beginning of the first rehearsal, listen to “Shut Up And Dance” as a class one more time before attempting to play it. Discuss the form and arrangement of the song and any changes agreed upon in the brainstorm session.

Next, set up instruments and play the song. Stop after each playthrough of the song to discuss any changes that need to be made and clear up any questions the class may have. Once the ensemble is comfortable with the song and has successfully played it multiple times, record one final play-through (a phone camera recording will do just fine).

After rehearsal, make the video accessible to students and have them watch it before the next meeting. Start the next rehearsal by watching the video together and having a class discussion. How does the song feel overall? Is the arrangement effective? Does the band nail the tempo and dynamics of the song? Does it feel like anything is missing? If so, discuss how to adapt. Repeat this process for as many rehearsals as it takes to nail the tune!

Thematic Transformations

National Standards: 1-9

Not all compositions have one, but a great theme is fundamental to a memorable piece of music, even if the theme itself is subtle. A theme doesn't have to be a prominent melody. It can be anything - a rhythmic idea played across different instruments at different times, a recurring sound effect, or a chord progression that appears in multiple songs on an album. There are many tools and techniques for creating and developing great themes, and the three described here are an excellent start. Share them with your class today!

Prepare

To prepare for this lesson, conduct a classroom discussion about the concept of a theme in music. What is a theme? Have multiple volunteers offer their answers. Can anyone name a famous theme from a movie, musical, song, or album? Take note of their answers. Are their examples all melodies? If so, challenge them. Can something besides a melody be a theme? Does a theme have to be played identically every time it appears, or can it morph and evolve?

After discussing, read the article as a class.

Key points in the article:

- A theme is any recurring musical element that represents what a piece of music is about. The most common examples are often prominent melodies or hooks, but that is only one type. Themes connect the listener to the meaning of a piece of music, even if they are not conscious of it.
- Thematic development is the process of taking the base elements of a theme, no matter how subtle or sparse, and developing them into an integral part of the music. This is done through repetition and strategic variation, adding or changing parts of the theme to deepen its impact over time.
- Development of a theme can be done compositionally or through improvisation, and the article lists three tactics that can be employed in either scenario: altering the rhythm, adding ornamentation, and adding call and response phrases.

Begin

Review Vocabulary words from the article below:

- **Recurring:** occurring again periodically or repeatedly
- **Ornamental:** decorative; beautiful rather than useful
- **Subsume:** to include or absorb (something) in something else
- **Opus:** any artistic work, especially one on a large scale
- **Virtuosity:** great skill in music or another artistic pursuit

Discuss

While reading the article together, stop at each example and allow students to work through it individually or in small groups. Allow volunteers to demonstrate the example for the class. If they perform the example correctly, allow the rest of the class to join in as a group. Playing the examples together in real time will help the group internalize the concept.

Afterwards, discuss the article and examples as a class. Which tactic did they find the most inspiring? Did they struggle to understand any of the tactics? After working through the examples, do they feel prepared to recognize and interpret thematic transformations in the music they hear every day?

O&A

1. Which famous film's theme, written by John Williams, uses only two notes?
2. Which two improvising musicians are listed as masters of ornamenting and expanding a theme?
3. What is a musical theme?
4. Which tactic listed in the article can help a solo instrument take up lots of great space?
5. True or false: repeating a theme can connect listeners to that music, even if listeners don't know they are hearing the repetition.

Answers

1. *Jaws*
2. Louis Armstrong and Ella Fitzgerald
3. Any recurring musical element that represents what a piece of music is about
4. Call and response
5. True

Expand

For a research assignment/presentation:

Have students select any piece of music to analyze – a song they like, a piece from a musical or a film score, or a live improvisational performance can all work. Students will identify the theme of the piece and provide a time stamp for each time it appears. If appropriate for the level and focus of the class, have students transcribe the melody or rhythm of each instance of the theme. Then students will write a short description of how the theme evolves over the course of the composition. How does the artist transform the theme? Do they use any of the techniques listed in the article? What is the overall emotional impact of the theme? Does it take on new meaning or emotion as it develops?

The Field Keeps Moving

National Standards: 10-11

In Tune's annual Marching Arts report is back with the latest in the world of marching, and the future of the activity is as bright as ever. At every level, from beginner bands to the heights of DCI, marching ensembles are pushing the limits of technicality, artistry, and expression, and opening the doors to more potential marchers than ever. There has never been a better time to get involved. Share this year's marching roundup with your class today!

Prepare

Ask students to describe the different forms of marching, and which they prefer. Is it watching a marching band at a parade? At a football game? Have any been to a drum corps or indoor marching event? What about a pep band in the stands at a basketball game. How many are currently marching? How many might like to join a marching ensemble?

After the conversation, read the article as a class.

Key points in the article:

- There are more opportunities than ever to get involved in marching. Many marching bands do not require experience to join, and some even accept new members without instrumental experience. Wherever you may be, odds are there is a marching opportunity within reach.
- One of the most exciting and accessible opportunities to perform is with DCI's SoundSport. With a minimum requirement of only five performers, no restrictions on instruments, and an opt-in judging system, SoundSport is a perfect launchpad for small ensembles of any kind.
- While the marching journey ends for many at high school graduation, college presents a brand new opportunity for those who wish to continue. The culture and expectations may be different at the next level, but the heart of the activity remains – camaraderie, pride, and the communal joy of music.

Begin

Review vocabulary words from the article below:

- **Endeavor:** an attempt to do something, especially something new or original
- **Accommodate:** to have or provide the space that someone or something needs
- **Legible:** capable of being read or deciphered
- **Narrative:** a spoken or written account of connected events; a story
- **Flashpoint:** a place, event, or time at which anger or conflict flares up

Discuss

After reading the article, ask the class if they learned about any new marching opportunities from the article. Were they surprised by the level of accessibility and number of opportunities? For those who already march, do they feel inspired to pursue marching in college, or perhaps with an elite DCI or WGI ensemble? For those who do not march (yet), are they encouraged by what they read? Do they feel more prepared to take the next step?

Q&A

1. As color guards embrace narrative again, what two sources are they drawing their vocabulary from?
2. What is the minimum group size to participate in SoundSport? What instruments are eligible?
3. Are college marching bands open to non-music majors?
4. True or False: there are no marching opportunities for those who do not already play an instrument.
5. Conversations around _____ and _____ have prompted organizations to experiment with shorter tours, regional models, and hybrid educational pathways.

Answers

1. Modern dance and theater
2. Five or more; any instruments
3. Yes
4. False
5. Access; sustainability

Expand

For an extra assignment, have students investigate a local opportunity to join a marching ensemble. It could be their own school's marching band/color guard, a local college's band, a community band, a DCI Corps or SoundSport group, or any other format.

Students will write a short report of their findings, including why they are interested in that particular group, requirements for joining the ensemble (experience/skill level, cost, travel availability, etc), and audition dates or application process.